

MONDAY APRIL 11

Riverflow: Aline  
to Azusa 9:15 am

🚗 Highland Park / Pasadena

Flow: Toward Union  
Station

Heavy Car Traffic

Heritage / Chinatown

- Away From H. / I.S.

- Mia Steppin' Up > Bec  
: childshame? : crawl  
: Mat Damon?

- Bit Bucket: Footer!

- Tot Gear Bec



CAN TOS  
CREEK  
SHALLOW  
~ 3in Deep

- FIFA 26 - LOS ANGELES  
- CHRON UPL/NASA  
INTAKE - PACE  
APPLICATION WORLDVIEW  
- BIT BUCKET REPO  
PUBLISH TO WEB  
LIKE PAGES





## African Territory With 'Biggest Opportunity'

Berbera Port in Somaliland. Officials in the breakaway territory hope President Trump will push for their wish of statehood. Page 16.

## How Musk's Team Collects, and Connects, Data About You

By EMILY BADGER  
and SHEERA FRENKEL

The federal government knows your mother's maiden name and your bank account number. The student debt you hold. Your disability status. The company that employs you and the wages you earn there. And that's just a start.

These intimate details about the personal lives of people who live in the United States are held

in disconnected data systems across the federal government — some at the Treasury, some at the Social Security Administration and some at the Department of Education, among other agencies.

The Trump administration is now trying to connect the dots of that disparate information. Last month, President Trump signed an executive order calling for the "consolidation" of these segregated records, raising the

### But How Much Access Is Too Much?

prospect of creating a kind of data trove about Americans that the government has never had before, and that members of the president's own party have historically opposed.

The effort is being driven by

Elon Musk, the world's richest man, and his lieutenants with the Department of Government Efficiency, who have sought access to dozens of databases as they have swept through agencies across the federal government. Along the way, they have elbowed past the objections of career staff, data security protocols, national security experts and legal privacy protections.

Continued on Page 24

## What Led Iran To Drop Its Ban On U.S. Talks

By FARNAZ FASSIHI

It was a closely held, urgent meeting.

Iran was pondering a response to President Trump's letter seeking nuclear negotiations. So the country's president, as well as the heads of the judiciary and Parliament, huddled with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, last month, according to two senior Iranian officials familiar with the meeting.

Mr. Khamenei had publicly and repeatedly banned engaging with Washington, calling it unwise and idiotic. The senior officials, in an unusual coordinated effort, urged him to change course, said the two officials, who asked not to be named to discuss sensitive issues.

The message to Mr. Khamenei was blunt: Allow Tehran to negotiate with Washington, even directly if necessary, because otherwise the Islamic Republic's rule could be toppled.

The country was already dealing with an economy in shambles, a currency plunging against the dollar and shortages of gas, electricity and water. The threat of war with the United States and Israel was extremely serious, the officials warned. If Iran refused



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THEA TRAFF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## A Room of One's Own, With No Strings

Permanent supportive housing has helped reduce chronic homelessness for people with mental illness and addiction, like those who live at New York City's Lenniger Residences, above. Page 38.

## Inside a Music Mogul's 'Soul Crushing' Quarters

By JULIA JACOBS

Sean Combs's hair and beard, once jet black, are gray now. Hair dye is not allowed at the Metropolitan Detention Center.

Breakfast is at 7 a.m. The exercise room has yoga mats and a small basketball hoop. The communal space in the dorm-style housing he's been assigned has pingpong and television. There is phone access that has allowed him to speak to the rapper Ye and also

### Combs Biding Time in Jail as Trial Awaits

"Thank y'all for being strong and thank y'all for being by my side," Mr. Combs said in a video released by his family.

The Brooklyn jail has drawn complaints over the years as a place filled with mold, vermin and neglect, which the Federal Bureau

of Investigation, who is awaiting trial in circumstances far removed from the life of personal chefs and enormous mansions he once enjoyed.

The music mogul also known as Puff Daddy and Diddy is facing years in prison if convicted on the racketeering and sex trafficking charges he faces when his trial begins next month. His lawyers argued strenuously after his arrest last September that Mr. Combs should be free until trial.

Motion after motion, and three

## Two Leaders in Trade War Test Their People's Resolve

### Americans Stock Up, Anticipating Pain

By MADELEINE NGO

WASHINGTON — Emily Moen, a coffee shop manager in Omaha, was scrolling through TikTok last week when she came across a video informing her that President Trump's tariffs could lead to higher prices for essential baby products.

Ms. Moen, who is pregnant, said that she had not planned to buy a car seat soon. But after watching the video, she researched one made by Graco that she had been eyeing, and learned that it was made in China. Worried that the \$200 seat could get even more expensive, she bought it on Amazon.

"It was like an awakening to get this done now," said Ms. Moen, 29.

As the Trump administration's trade war with China escalates, many consumers have raced to purchase foreign-made products out of fear that companies could start to raise prices soon. Some have rushed to buy big-ticket items like iPhones and refrigerators. Others have hurriedly placed orders for cheap goods from Chinese e-commerce platforms.

The White House last week imposed a minimum tariff rate of 145 percent on all Chinese imports to the United States, on top of other previously announced levies, including a 25 percent tariff on steel, aluminum, cars and car parts.

And earlier this month, Mr. Trump ordered the end of a loophole that allowed goods from China worth less than \$800 to enter the America without tariffs.

Early data show that consumers flocked to stores and stocked up on goods after the administration announced sweeping tariffs on nearly all trading partners. Mr. Trump backed down on some threats last week and instituted a 90-day pause on more punishing levies. But he said that the halt would not apply to China.

Then the administration issued another reprieve. Late Friday, it announced a new rule that appeared to spare smartphones, computers and other electronics from most of the new fees.

China is the second largest

Continued on Page 28

### Xi Sees Austerity as a Nation's Duty

President Trump did not seem to mind as his worldwide tariffs set off stock market sell-offs and wiped out trillions of dollars in wealth.

"Be cool," he told Americans.

Then he blinked

on Wednesday

afternoon in the

face of financial

turmoil, particularly a rapid rise in

government bond yields that

could shake the dominant position of the dollar and the foundation of the U.S. economy.

By pausing some tariffs for dozens of countries for 90 days, he also gave away something to his main rival, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping, with whom he has engaged in a game of chicken that risks decoupling the world's two biggest economies and turning the global economic order upside down.

Mr. Xi learned that his adversary has a pain point.

As reckless and ruthless as Mr. Trump may seem to some parts of the world, in Mr. Xi and China he is squaring off with a leader and a party state that have a long history of single-minded pursuit of policies, even when they resulted in economic and human catastrophe.

Among Chinese, a consensus among both Beijing's critics and its supporters is that the endgame may come down to which leader will be able to make his people endure misery in the name of the national interest.

"Tariffs and even economic sanctions are not Xi Jinping's pressure points," Hao Qun, an exiled Chinese novelist who writes under the name Murong Xuecun, wrote on X. "He is not particularly concerned about the hardships tariffs may cause for ordinary people."

Unlike Mr. Trump, Mr. Xi does not speak to the Chinese public through social media platforms, although he controls all of them. Everything he says and does is choreographed. It is impossible to get into his head because the public knows little about him

Continued on Page 9

**TAIWAN'S EXPORTERS** Many small factories thrive by being frugal and flexible. But tariff unpredictability is testing their limits. PAGE 9

**ECHOES OF BREXIT** Leaving the E.U. was sold to British voters in 2016 as a magic bullet for the economy. Its impact is still being felt. PAGE 10

## 'Skin' Bandages Cost Medicare, And Doctors Get a Cut of Billions

By SARAH KLIFF and KATIE THOMAS

Seniors across the country are wearing very expensive bandages.

Made of dried bits of placenta, the paper-thin patches cover stubborn wounds and can cost thousands of dollars per square inch.

Some research has found that such so-called skin substitutes help certain wounds heal. But in the past few years, dozens of untested and costly products have flooded the market.

Bandage companies set ever-rising prices for new brands of the products, taking advantage of a loophole in Medicare rules, The New York Times found. Some doctors then buy the coverings at large discounts but charge Medicare the full sticker price, pocketing the difference.

Partly because of these financial incentives, many patients receive the bandages who do not need them. The result, experts said, is one of the largest exam-

are unproven and unnecessary. But Medicare, the government insurance program for seniors, routinely covers them. Spending on skin substitutes exceeded \$10 billion in 2024, more than double the figure in 2023, according to an analysis of Medicare data done for The Times by Early Read, a firm that evaluates costs for large health companies.

Medicare now spends more on the bandages than on ambulance rides, anesthesia or CT scans, the analysis found.

On Friday, the Trump administration announced that it would delay a Biden-era plan to restrict Medicare's coverage of skin substitutes, saying that it was reviewing its policies until at least 2026. President Trump had received a large campaign donation from a leading bandage seller and skewered the plan on social media.

Skin substitute companies said that the spending could be ex-



# Combs Incarcerated: Checks, Monotony Jailhouse Lasagna

Page 1

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ess tampering — to  
bail.

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no has pleaded not  
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that houses more  
ates and is beset by  
or attrition among  
its guards and  
violence within  
its walls.

The govern-  
ment has de-  
picted Mr.  
Combs in court  
papers as the  
boss of a violent  
criminal con-  
spiracy that  
napping, arson and  
while enabling Mr.  
l abuse of women.

lawyers have as-  
e charges actually  
sensual sex with  
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Inmates are generally free to  
move around the unit, which has  
rows of bunk beds, televisions, a  
microwave and the room where  
inmates have in the past worked  
out on mats with exercise balls,  
Mr. Borrello said. There are multi-  
ple compulsory check-ins each  
day at one’s bunk, overseen by  
correction officers.

The bathroom has stalls, and in-  
mates take meals at tables inside  
the unit’s common area, said Mr.  
Borrello, who was last housed  
there in 2023.

Inmates do not have access to  
the internet, but they could watch  
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Previous high-profile occu-  
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with Mr. Combs, is awaiting trial  
from the same jail, but is not  
housed in the same unit.)

Mr. Bankman-Fried, who is ap-  
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“He’s been kind,” Mr. Bankman-  
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position no one wants to be in. Ob-  
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you said, it’s kind of a soul-crush-  
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Mr. Combs meets with mem-  
bers of his legal team frequently,  
sometimes in a conference room  
off the common area of his unit. He  
was provided a laptop without Wi-  
Fi — at his lawyers’s urging — to  
work through the mountain of evi-  
dence that prosecutors have  
turned over before trial. He can  
use the laptop between 8 a.m. and  
3:30 p.m. each day in the unit’s  
visiting room or in a room re-  
served for inmates to take video  
calls.

The trial in Federal District  
Court in Manhattan is expected to  
last about eight weeks. Opening  
statements are scheduled for May  
12.

Packets of mackerel, known as  
“macks,” operate as a kind of cur-  
rency between inmates; they are  
on sale at the commissary for one  
dollar each.



JEENAH MOON/REUTERS

Inside the detention center, lo-  
cated on the Brooklyn waterfront  
near a recycling facility, male pre-  
trial inmates wear brown jail  
clothes. There is a rotating food  
menu: The second Friday of the  
month, for example, means lasa-

Nearly eight months  
in a facility filled with  
mold and vermin.

gna or “pasta fazool” for the vege-  
tarians, as well as spinach and sal-  
ad.

The commissary stocks snacks  
like Snickers (\$5.95 for a pack of  
six) and Cheez-Its (\$3.65), as well  
as toiletries and other items like  
radios and watches. Inmates are  
allowed to spend up to \$180 every  
two weeks, using money that fam-  
ily and friends can funnel into  
their commissary funds.

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rency between inmates; they are  
on sale at the commissary for one  
dollar each.

For Mr. Combs’s unit, visitors  
are allowed on Tuesdays. Phone  
calls are capped at 15 minutes  
each and can be monitored by the  
government. A leaked clip of Mr.  
Combs’s call with Ye, formerly  
known as Kanye West, included  
snippets of Mr. Combs encourag-  
ing Ye to make new music and  
promising to call again.

“Fifty-nine more days before  
trial, so I’ll definitely be touching  
in, to tap into your energy or  
something,” Mr. Combs said in the  
recording, before remarking on  
how “sad” his current situation  
was. “I’m Puff Daddy in jail,” he la-  
mented.

Brad Rouse, a consultant to  
criminal defendants who landed  
at the Brooklyn jail on drug  
charges in 2008, spent a year in a  
dormitory-style unit one floor be-  
low where Mr. Combs is staying.  
The difference between commu-  
nal living and isolation is vast, he  
said.

“Just being able to interact, play  
chess and talk makes all the differ-  
ence in the world,” Mr. Rouse said.

For years, defense lawyers  
have objected to the conditions at  
the Brooklyn jail, which has taken  
on more of a burden since the clo-  
sure of the Metropolitan Correc-

tional Center in Manhattan in  
2021.

Last year, a federal judge de-  
scribed the conditions in the  
Brooklyn facility as “grim,” citing  
complaints about extended lock-  
downs, understaffing and delayed  
medical care. Federal prison offi-  
cials said they have been working  
to address the complaints and  
take their duty to protect its in-  
mates and staff seriously.

Mr. Combs’s lawyers have not  
publicly taken issue with living  
conditions in 4 North, but they  
have objected to government  
monitoring of his communications  
and a search of his personal notes  
that were kept inside the unit.

Last year, prosecutors said that,  
during a preplanned sweep of the  
jail meant to uncover “potential  
corruption and contraband,” an in-  
vestigator took photos of some of  
Mr. Combs’s personal notes. They  
included innocuous material such  
as a reminder of a family mem-  
ber’s birthday and inspirational  
quotes, along with notes that the  
government argued were evi-  
dence that Mr. Combs was trying  
to obstruct the prosecution, in-  
cluding one that related to him di-  
recting someone to find “dirt” on  
two alleged victims.

The Metropolitan Deten-  
tion Center in Brooklyn.  
The conditions on the  
floor where Mr. Combs is  
being held, usually re-  
served for high-profile  
inmates, are far more  
lenient than other units.

“The evidence shows the gov-  
ernment is using Mr. Combs’s de-  
tention to spy on him and invade  
his confidential communications  
with his counsel,” the defense  
wrote in court papers.

Prosecutors defended the  
search as within the law but said  
they would not use any of the  
notes in their case against Mr.  
Combs. A judge ruled that his  
rights had not been violated.

The dispute provided a small  
window into Mr. Combs’s commu-  
nications from jail.

According to prosecutors, Mr.  
Combs bought the use of other in-  
mates’ phone privileges by direct-  
ing others to pay into their com-  
missary accounts; on some of  
those calls, they said, he strate-  
gized about using public state-  
ments to affect the potential jury  
pool’s perception of him. They also  
said he has tried to contact poten-  
tial witnesses through three-way  
calling, which allows him to reach  
people outside his approved con-  
tact list.

Prosecutors said Mr. Combs or-  
ganized the video later posted to  
his Instagram that shows his sev-  
en children wishing him a happy  
birthday, with Mr. Combs on  
speakerphone. After it was  
posted, prosecutors said, Mr.  
Combs — long known for his at-  
tention to marketing — monitored  
the post’s analytics from jail.

“The defendant has demon-  
strated an uncanny ability to get  
others to do his bidding — employ-  
ees, family members, and M.D.C.  
inmates alike,” the prosecutors  
wrote, referring to the Brooklyn  
jail.

The defense says Mr. Combs’s  
communications from jail are far  
from nefarious. His modes of com-  
municating, including by tapping  
into other inmates’ allotted min-  
utes, are widespread practice, his  
lawyers argued. They asserted  
that Mr. Combs was not trying to  
obstruct the prosecution, saying  
repeatedly that he intends to face  
the charges against him head-on.

The stakes are high. Mr. Combs  
has been arrested several times  
before but never spent any signifi-  
cant time in custody during those  
cases. Now he is approaching his  
eighth month. If he is convicted,  
Mr. Combs will face the possibility  
of spending the rest of his life in  
federal prison.

## Plaintiffs Granted \$4 Billion Payout

By SHAWN HUBLER  
and SHAILA DEWAN

LOS ANGELES — MaryAlice  
Ashbrook remembers the rain on  
the night the Los Angeles police  
retrieved her, the 8-year-old child  
of a pill-addicted mother, and took  
her to the MacLaren Children’s  
Center, the county-run foster  
home where she was preyed upon.

Shirley Bodkin remembers the  
smell of the staff member who put  
her on his lap and made her hold a  
Raggedy Ann doll while he hurt  
her. J.C. Wright remembers the so-  
cial workers who accused him, at  
age 7, of “fabricating” when he  
tried telling them what a doctor  
there had done to him.

Those memories are decades  
old. Ms. Ashbrook is 65 now, a re-  
tired bookkeeper in Yuma, Ariz.  
Ms. Bodkin is 58, the mother of  
two grown sons in the Southern  
California beach town of Dana  
Point. Mr. Wright is 42, a truck  
driver and father of four in subur-  
ban Los Angeles.

Whole chapters of their lives  
have gone by — marriages, chil-  
dren, careers — yet the memories  
have never ceased to torment  
them. Ms. Ashbrook tried electro-  
shock therapy. Ms. Bodkin at-  
tempted suicide. Mr. Wright lived  
on the streets, ending up in prison.  
There was no escaping the night-  
mares, they said in recent inter-  
views. So they turned to the courts  
for some measure of relief.

Early this month, it arrived, for  
them and nearly 7,000 other plain-  
tiffs who say they were sexually  
abused as children in Los Angeles  
County’s juvenile detention and  
foster care systems, in cases dat-  
ing to the late 1950s. In a settle-  
ment that lawyers say is the larg-  
est of its kind in the nation, the  
county publicly apologized and  
agreed to pay a record \$4 billion,  
dwarfing previous settlements in  
child sex abuse cases brought  
against the Boy Scouts of America  
and the Archdiocese of Los Ange-  
les.

The wave of claims came after  
California gave childhood victims  
a new window to sue, even though  
the statute of limitations had ex-  
pired. The county’s Board of Su-  
pervisors is expected to formally  
approve the payout on April 29.

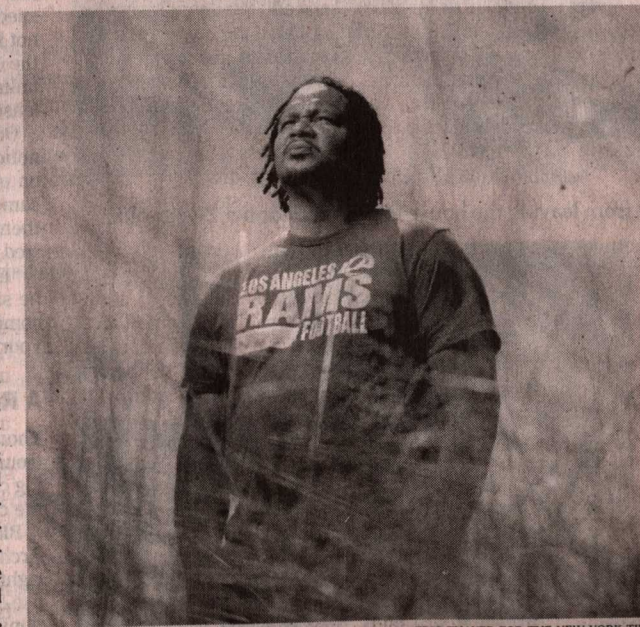
Some two dozen states have es-  
tablished similar “lookback win-  
dows” in response to a growing  
understanding of the many rea-  
sons child sex abuse victims  
might not come forward, or even  
think of themselves as having  
been abused, until years or dec-  
ades later.

The new statutes have  
prompted thousands of lawsuits  
and concern about potentially  
enormous liabilities to taxpayers.



JOHN FRANCIS PETERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

MaryAlice Ashbrook was taken to MacLaren Children’s  
Center in Los Angeles County when she was 8.



ERIC THAYER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

J.C. Wright said he was abused. “Still, to this day, I can’t  
go to the dentist without my wife holding my hand.”

Shirley Bodkin said she  
facility decades ago

cantly reduced the use of large,  
risk-prone group homes like Mac-  
Laren. It now conducts “compre-  
hensive background checks” and  
has established or revised more  
than 20 policies designed to pre-  
vent sexual abuse, according to  
the county.

Additional reforms are being  
developed or are underway,  
county officials added, including  
possible ways to resolve sexual  
abuse claims more quickly. And  
while no one has been arrested in  
connection with the abuses at  
MacLaren Hall, as it was colloqui-  
ally known, officials said investi-  
gations were continuing, with at  
least two cases referred to the dis-  
trict attorney for possible pros-  
ecution.

Opened in 1961 as a temporary  
shelter for children awaiting

you — and you go tell them. And  
they tell you you’re lying. Or you  
need attention.”

He broke down, sobbing.  
“I just — wanted them — to stop  
it,” he said, his wife’s hand rubbing  
his muscled arm to comfort him,  
his voice catching and choking  
like a child’s.

The cases of Mr. Wright, Ms.  
Bodkin and Ms. Ashbrook all stem  
from their time at MacLaren,  
which was a fixture of Los Ange-  
les’s social service system for  
more than three decades. It was  
named far more often than any  
other facility in the lawsuits that  
were settled.

Opened in 1961 as a temporary  
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lived two hours away, called  
police to report her mother.  
MacLaren, she said, she and other  
children were sexually abused  
a guard who medicated them with  
antipsychotic drugs and took  
them to a “special room.”

She had been at MacLaren  
about two weeks, she said, when  
she met Ms. Bodkin, a toddler  
with pale blond hair whom she  
rescued one day from a closet.  
“I heard scratching and crying  
and screaming for help,” she said.  
“I opened the door and there was  
this little girl, scared out of her  
mind.”

Ms. Bodkin said it was not until  
decades later that their paths  
crossed again. Her own mother

DOLOMITES, ITALY

DREAMING OF



# os Incarcerated: Checks, Monotony Jailhouse Lasagna

Page 1

to the community  
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use the laptop between 8 a.m. and  
3:30 p.m. each day in the unit's  
visiting room or in a room re-  
served for inmates to take video  
calls.

The trial in Federal District  
Court in Manhattan is expected to  
last about eight weeks. Opening  
statements are scheduled for May  
12.

Packets of mackerel, known as  
"macks," operate as a kind of cur-  
rency between inmates; they are  
on sale at the commissary for one  
dollar each.



JEENAH MOON/REUTERS

Inside the detention center, lo-  
cated on the Brooklyn waterfront  
near a recycling facility, male pre-  
trial inmates wear brown jail  
clothes. There is a rotating food  
menu: The second Friday of the  
month, for example, means lasa-

**Nearly eight months  
in a facility filled with  
mold and vermin.**

gna or "pasta fazool" for the vege-  
tarians, as well as spinach and sal-  
ad.

The commissary stocks snacks  
like Snickers (\$5.95 for a pack of  
six) and Cheez-Its (\$3.65), as well  
as toiletries and other items like  
radios and watches. Inmates are  
allowed to spend up to \$180 every  
two weeks, using money that fam-  
ily and friends can funnel into  
their commissary funds.

Packets of mackerel, known as  
"macks," operate as a kind of cur-  
rency between inmates; they are  
on sale at the commissary for one  
dollar each.

For Mr. Combs's unit, visitors  
are allowed on Tuesdays. Phone  
calls are capped at 15 minutes  
each and can be monitored by the  
government. A leaked clip of Mr.  
Combs's call with Ye, formerly  
known as Kanye West, included  
snippets of Mr. Combs encourag-  
ing Ye to make new music and  
promising to call again.

"Fifty-nine more days before  
trial, so I'll definitely be touching  
in, to tap into your energy or  
something," Mr. Combs said in the  
recording, before remarking on  
how "sad" his current situation  
was. "I'm Puff Daddy in jail," he  
lamented.

Brad Rouse, a consultant to  
criminal defendants who landed  
at the Brooklyn jail on drug  
charges in 2008, spent a year in a  
dormitory-style unit one floor be-  
low where Mr. Combs is staying.  
The difference between commu-  
nal living and isolation is vast, he  
said.

"Just being able to interact, play  
chess and talk makes all the differ-  
ence in the world," Mr. Rouse said.

For years, defense lawyers  
have objected to the conditions at  
the Brooklyn jail, which has taken  
on more of a burden since the clo-  
sure of the Metropolitan Correc-

tional Center in Manhattan in  
2021.

Last year, a federal judge de-  
scribed the conditions in the  
Brooklyn facility as "grim," citing  
complaints about extended lock-  
downs, understaffing and delayed  
medical care. Federal prison offi-  
cials said they have been working  
to address the complaints and  
take their duty to protect its in-  
mates and staff seriously.

Mr. Combs's lawyers have not  
publicly taken issue with living  
conditions in 4 North, but they  
have objected to government  
monitoring of his communications  
and a search of his personal notes  
that were kept inside the unit.

Last year, prosecutors said that,  
during a preplanned sweep of the  
jail meant to uncover "potential  
corruption and contraband," an in-  
vestigator took photos of some of  
Mr. Combs's personal notes. They  
included innocuous material such  
as a reminder of a family mem-  
ber's birthday and inspirational  
quotes, along with notes that the  
government argued were evi-  
dence that Mr. Combs was trying  
to obstruct the prosecution, in-  
cluding one that related to him di-  
recting someone to find "dirt" on  
two alleged victims.

The Metropolitan Deten-  
tion Center in Brooklyn.  
The conditions on the  
floor where Mr. Combs is  
being held, usually re-  
served for high-profile  
inmates, are far more  
lenient than other units.

"The evidence shows the gov-  
ernment is using Mr. Combs's de-  
tention to spy on him and invade  
his confidential communications  
with his counsel," the defense  
wrote in court papers.

Prosecutors defended the  
search as within the law but said  
they would not use any of the  
notes in their case against Mr.  
Combs. A judge ruled that his  
rights had not been violated.

The dispute provided a small  
window into Mr. Combs's commu-  
nications from jail.

According to prosecutors, Mr.  
Combs bought the use of other in-  
mates' phone privileges by direct-  
ing others to pay into their com-  
missary accounts; on some of  
those calls, they said, he strate-  
gized about using public state-  
ments to affect the potential jury  
pool's perception of him. They also  
said he has tried to contact poten-  
tial witnesses through three-way  
calling, which allows him to reach  
people outside his approved con-  
tact list.

Prosecutors said Mr. Combs or-  
ganized the video later posted to  
his Instagram that shows his sev-  
en children wishing him a happy  
birthday, with Mr. Combs on  
speakerphone. After it was  
posted, prosecutors said, Mr.  
Combs — long known for his at-  
tention to marketing — monitored  
the post's analytics from jail.

"The defendant has demon-  
strated an uncanny ability to get  
others to do his bidding — employ-  
ees, family members, and M.D.C.  
inmates alike," the prosecutors  
wrote, referring to the Brooklyn  
jail.

The defense says Mr. Combs's  
communications from jail are far  
from nefarious. His modes of com-  
municating, including by tapping  
into other inmates allotted min-  
utes, are widespread practice, his  
lawyers argued. They asserted  
that Mr. Combs was not trying to  
obstruct the prosecution, saying  
repeatedly that he intends to face  
the charges against him head-on.

The stakes are high. Mr. Combs  
has been arrested several times  
before but never spent any signifi-  
cant time in custody during those  
cases. Now he is approaching his  
eighth month. If he is convicted,  
Mr. Combs will face the possibility  
of spending the rest of his life in  
federal prison.

## Sex Abuse Settlement in L.A., After Childhoods of 'Pure Hell'

### Plaintiffs Granted \$4 Billion Payout

By SHAWN HUBLER  
and SHAILA DEWAN

LOS ANGELES — MaryAlice  
Ashbrook remembers the rain on  
the night the Los Angeles police  
retrieved her, the 8-year-old child  
of a pill-addicted mother, and took  
her to the MacLaren Children's  
Center, the county-run foster  
home where she was preyed upon.

Shirley Bodkin remembers the  
smell of the staff member who put  
her on his lap and made her hold a  
Raggedy Ann doll while he hurt  
her. J.C. Wright remembers the so-  
cial workers who accused him, at  
age 7, of "fabricating" when he  
tried telling them what a doctor  
there had done to him.

Those memories are decades  
old. Ms. Ashbrook is 65 now, a re-  
tired bookkeeper in Yuma, Ariz.  
Ms. Bodkin is 58, the mother of  
two grown sons in the Southern  
California beach town of Dana  
Point. Mr. Wright is 42, a truck  
driver and father of four in subur-  
ban Los Angeles.

Whole chapters of their lives  
have gone by — marriages, chil-  
dren, careers — yet the memories  
have never ceased to torment  
them. Ms. Ashbrook tried electro-  
shock therapy. Ms. Bodkin at-  
tempted suicide. Mr. Wright lived  
on the streets, ending up in prison.  
There was no escaping the night-  
mares, they said in recent inter-  
views. So they turned to the courts  
for some measure of relief.

Early this month, it arrived, for  
them and nearly 7,000 other plain-  
tiffs who say they were sexually  
abused as children in Los Angeles  
County's juvenile detention and  
foster care systems, in cases dat-  
ing to the late 1950s. In a settle-  
ment that lawyers say is the larg-  
est of its kind in the nation, the  
county publicly apologized and  
agreed to pay a record \$4 billion,  
dwarfing previous settlements in  
child sex abuse cases brought  
against the Boy Scouts of America  
and the Archdiocese of Los Ange-  
les.

The wave of claims came after  
California gave childhood victims  
a new window to sue, even though  
the statute of limitations had ex-  
pired. The county's Board of Su-  
pervisors is expected to formally  
approve the payout on April 29.

Some two dozen states have es-  
tablished similar "lookback win-  
dows" in response to a growing  
understanding of the many rea-  
sons child sex abuse victims  
might not come forward, or even  
think of themselves as having  
been abused, until years or dec-  
ades later.

The new statutes have  
prompted thousands of lawsuits



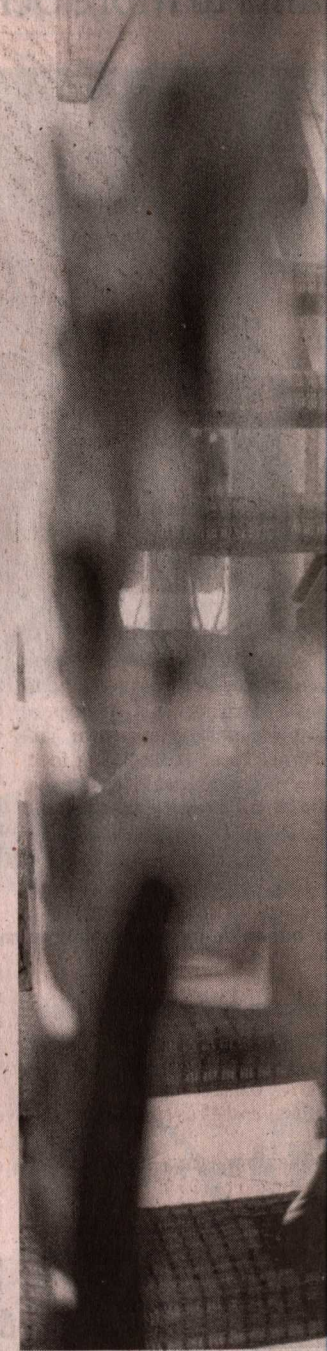
JOHN FRANCIS PETERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

MaryAlice Ashbrook was taken to MacLaren Children's  
Center in Los Angeles County when she was 8.



ERIC THAYER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

J.C. Wright said he was abused. "Still, to this day, I can't  
go to the dentist without my wife holding my hand."



Shirley Bodkin said she was  
abused in the facility decades ago.

cantly reduced the use of large,  
risk-prone group homes like Mac-  
Laren. It now conducts "compre-  
hensive background checks" and  
has established or revised more  
than 20 policies designed to pre-  
vent sexual abuse, according to  
the county.

Additional reforms are being  
developed or are underway,  
county officials added, including  
possible ways to resolve sexual  
abuse claims more quickly. And  
while no one has been arrested in  
connection with the abuses at  
MacLaren Hall, as it was colloqui-  
ally known, officials said investi-  
gations were continuing, with at

least one person charged. The  
cases of Mr. Wright, Ms.  
Bodkin and Ms. Ashbrook all stem  
from their time at MacLaren,  
which was a fixture of Los Ange-  
les's social service system for  
more than three decades. It was  
named far more often than any  
other facility in the lawsuits that  
were settled.

you — and you go tell them. And  
they tell you you're lying. Or you  
need attention."

He broke down, sobbing.  
"I just — wanted them — to stop  
it," he said, his wife's hand rubbing  
his muscled arm to comfort him,  
his voice catching and choking  
like a child's.

The cases of Mr. Wright, Ms.  
Bodkin and Ms. Ashbrook all stem  
from their time at MacLaren,  
which was a fixture of Los Ange-  
les's social service system for  
more than three decades. It was  
named far more often than any  
other facility in the lawsuits that  
were settled.

lived two hours away, called the  
police to report her mother. At  
MacLaren, she said, she and other  
children were sexually abused by  
a guard who medicated them with  
antipsychotic drugs and took  
them to a "special room."

She had been at MacLaren for  
about two weeks, she said, when  
she met Ms. Bodkin, a toddler  
with pale blond hair whom she  
rescued one day from a closet.  
"I heard scratching and crying  
and screaming for help," she said.  
"I opened the door and there was  
this little girl, scared out of her  
mind."

Ms. Bodkin said it was not until

DOLOMITES, ITALY

DREAMING OF



## OPINION

# America Is Learning the Wrong Lesson From Musk's Success

Adam Grant

A contributing Opinion writer, an organizational psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of "Think Again."

**L**AST December, I asked my students at Wharton to nominate and vote on topics for our final class. The runaway top choice was leadership lessons from Elon Musk. It's become a hot topic among the corporate elite, too. At a recent leadership conference, the founder of a lucrative start-up said in passing that Mr. Musk was making dictators cool again. The chief executive of a large company said Mr. Musk was giving people like him their power back. A major investor concluded that Mr. Musk's success was proof that it's better to be feared than loved.

They were not speaking metaphorically. Mr. Musk has been known to shout and swear at employees who deliver work he considers subpar. He goes out of his way to swear people, as when he publicly accused a former Twitter department head of "arguing in favor of children being able to access adult Internet services." In his new role overseeing the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency, he expresses contempt for the work that many federal employees do and champions haphazard mass firings. Current and future business leaders are watching the world's richest man in action, and many of them are learning the wrong lesson about leadership.

As an organizational psychologist, I've long admired the boldness of Mr. Musk's vision, the intensity of his drive and the impact of his innovations in cars and rockets. But the way he deals with people would fail the leadership class I teach at his alma mater. For more than a century, my field has studied how leaders achieve great things. The evidence is clear: Leadership by intimidation and insult is a bad strategy. Belittling people doesn't boost their productivity; it diminishes it.

You can see it with elite athletes. In a study of nearly 700 N.B.A. players, those who had an abusive coach performed worse for the rest of their careers. Five years later, after changing teams, they were still adding less value on the court. They were also more likely to lash out and get charged with technical fouls.

Disrespect doesn't just demotivate. It also disrupts focus, causing costly mistakes. In a medical simulation, professionals in neonatal intensive care teams had to diagnose a potentially life-threatening condition and then respond rapidly with the correct procedures. Right beforehand, some of them were randomly assigned to hear a visiting expert disparage their work, saying they wouldn't last a week in his department. Briefly insulting physicians and nurses was enough to reduce the accuracy of their diagnoses by nearly 17 percent and the effectiveness of their procedures by 15 percent.

Take it from a review of over 400 studies across 36 countries with nearly 150,000 people: In the face of workplace aggression, people are less productive, less collaborative and more inclined to shirk their responsibilities. Abusive bosses break confidence and breed resentment. And ruthless, haphazard downsizing can cause the highest performers — the ones who have the best opportunities elsewhere — to jump ship. Denigrating people is not a path to accomplishing meaningful goals. It reflects a lack of self-control and a shortage of emotional intelligence.

Now comes the inevitable question: How often do you explain Mr. Musk's success?



DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

With Tesla and SpaceX, he's built two wildly prosperous companies, disrupting one industry and supercharging another. But those results have come in spite of the way he treats people, not because of it.

Why is it so easy to miss that point? The answer gets at a bigger truth about the way human beings think. Psychologists call it idiosyncrasy credit: As people accumulate status, we grant them more permission to deviate from social norms. So when we see leaders being uncivil, we often get cause and effect backward. We assume that being unkind makes them successful. In truth, however, success can give them a license to be unkind. Engineers at Tesla and SpaceX tolerate abuse from Mr. Musk because they admire the vision of Dr. Jekyll.

A common excuse for Mr. Musk's harshness is that he's in demon mode. But there's a big difference between demonizing people and demanding a lot from them.

Treating people with consideration actually makes them more open to tough feedback. Students are more receptive to constructive criticism if their teacher prefaces it with, "I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them." Work and sports teams respond better to negative emotions from leaders if they establish respect first.

Mr. Musk is aware of the impression that he makes. He once tweeted, "If I am a narcissist (which might be true), at least I am a useful one." He also recognizes that his intense emotions can create a climate of fear. When I first met him years ago, I asked him how he

**Intimidation doesn't elevate performance; it undermines people.**

makes it safe for SpaceX employees to speak up about problems with rockets. He said, "I try to make it unsafe to not do that." That is an admirable statement.

Promising to cut at least \$1 trillion from the federal budget, Mr. Musk has used the same tool kit that he's applied in the corporate sector: rapidly taking a chain saw to systems he believes are broken and firing a great many people at once, sometimes without any stated reason. Is it working?

If he's trying to build a more efficient, more transparent federal government, not so much. His team has done much of its work in secrecy, with little accountability and few dissenters around him to challenge his ideas — let alone rivals from the opposing party like the ones Lincoln assembled in his cabinet to promote diversity of thought and earn the public's trust. Mr. Musk has made too many mistakes, from unwittingly eliminating Ebola prevention programs to firing employees doing critical work on nuclear weapons and scientists working to prevent a bird flu pandemic. And it's hard to see how firing the folks who collect revenue is a good strategy for taming the budget or how eliminating oversight could help fight budgetary waste. But if his goal is to discredit government and demoralize workers, his strategy may be working.

Before Mr. Musk came along, the patron saint of demeaning leadership was Steve Jobs. Jony Ive, who worked with him for decades, said that when Mr. Jobs got frustrated, "his way to achieve catharsis is to hurt somebody. And I think he feels he has a liberty and a license to do that."

After being forced out of his own company in 1985, Mr. Jobs discovered that he was burning too many idiosyncrasy credits. Thanks to some brutally honest feedback, he came to see that by showing a little compassion, he would gain a lot of loyalty. "It was awful-tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it," he later said. The Steve Jobs who returned to Apple a dozen years later was a more decent person, and it made him a better leader. Mr. Jobs "went through a fairly dramatic change, and he became kinder and more empathetic," his longtime Pixar collaborator Ed Catmull told me. "It was the changed person who had those abilities to make this amazing impact in the world."

It's a pattern I've seen time and again, in my research: Givers add more value than takers. Studies show that tech companies are more profitable when servant leaders are at the helm. The competitive advantage comes from treating people better than they expect and earning their trust, which makes it easier to attract, motivate and retain talent. That doesn't mean being soft on people. Servant leaders aren't shy about dishing out tough love. But they put their mission above their ego, and they care about people as much as performance.

As Mr. Musk makes waves, I often think of the fact that he once studied where I now teach. I want my students to learn from his healthy disrespect for the status quo. But I hope they reject his unhealthy habit of showing disrespect for people. The purpose of studying role models is not to idolize them. It's to emulate their strengths and transcend their weaknesses.

## Food Poisoning May Be Making A Comeback

Deborah Blum

The author of "The Poison Squad: One Chemist's Single-Minded Crusade for Food"

tury of the great American stomachache." That is, until recently, when the Trump administration began to unravel that safety net.

Since President Trump's inauguration, his administration has been chipping away — sometimes quietly, sometimes with great fanfare — at food safety programs. In March, two Department of Agriculture advisory committees that had provided guidance on fighting microbial contamination of food as well as meat inspection protocols were shut down. The agency also expanded the ability of some meat processors to speed up production lines, making it more difficult to carry out careful inspections.

The administration also delayed a rule that would have required both manufacturers and grocery companies to quickly investigate food contamination and pull risky products from sale. At the start of April, thousands of federal health workers were fired on the orders of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.; a plan called for terminating 3,500 employees at the Food and Drug Administration — a move that he welcomed as a "revolution." Consumer watchdogs and others described it as a safety blood bath.

Not only did Wiley and his chemists find widespread fraud in the food supply, their work also helped reveal a routine use of poisons. Red lead was used to make Cheddar cheese more orange; arsenic was used to color candy and cake decorations green; the toxic embalming agent formaldehyde was used to preserve milk. So many children were sickened or killed by formaldehyde that by the 1890s, newspapers regularly reported on "embalmed milk scandals." All of this food adulteration was legal, of course.

Frustrated by the resistance of both industry and industry-funded congressional leaders, in 1902 Wiley began a study in which young U.S.D.A. workers, nicknamed "The Poison Squad" by the press, were knowingly fed a diet that included doses of potentially dangerous additives. Their resulting illnesses, received widespread national coverage, heavy with references to poison in the daily diet.

Public outrage was rising when the writer Upton Sinclair, in 1906, published a notably gruesome novel, "The Jungle," that focused on the unregulated and filthy practices of the meat industry. It was a proverbial last straw, the book leading to passage of the Meat In-

**If Trump relaxes safety precautions, we may rediscover the dangers of less regulation.**

More recently, the U.S.D.A. investigated a listeria outbreak that killed 10 people and spread to 19 states, and traced it to a Boar's Head deli meat plant in Jarratt, Va. Inspectors had found filthy conditions, including mold and dead insects; the company shut down the plant in September. And this year? The U.S.D.A. has issued a recall for more than 200,000 pounds of liquid egg products that appear to be contaminated with a cleaning solution. The F.D.A. has flagged stones in candy, a potential botulism-causing toxin in juice, and undeclared allergens, such as nuts, in salad dressing.

The United States clearly still needs the safety systems that were so painstakingly built over the last 120 years, and to make them better and stronger. The labs and scientists and inspection teams that have been recently lost should not only be restored but expanded. And the mistakes of the 19th century should stay firmly in the history books.



# Sunday Opinion

The New York Times

This baby was carefully selected as an embryo.

Her mother  
screened her for  
gender and health  
during I.V.F.



From fertility clinics to research labs and the courts, reproductive science is testing our ethics and laws.

The Embryo Question Can't Be Ignored



...had largely ignored I.V.F., since it is widely perceived as a tool to create, rather than destroy, "potential life." But this was a blunt assertion of full legal personhood for these little bundles of possibility that exist, as one scholar has put it, "at the borders of science, morality and democracy."

Since then, arguments over abortion have become more contested and more tightly entwined with the status of embryos, even outside their more familiar place

more than I could have imagined and in possession of six remaining embryos, frozen and waiting for my decision on their fate. Like many people who have gone through I.V.F., I have a complicated relationship with them and vacillate between wanting the finality of deciding and holding on to the possibility that they might one day, under circumstances yet unknown, come to life.

the future of how we treat them has to engage with these questions now.

**Anna Louie Sussman**

A journalist who writes about gender, economics and reproduction.

**Photographs by Dru Donovan**

A photographer and professor in Portland, Ore.

## CHAPTER 1

# SHOULD WE LIMIT EMBRYO RESEARCH?

**F**OR as long as scientists have worked with embryos, they've faced ethical questions about where to draw the line: How long is too long to grow a human embryo for research purposes? Two weeks? Four weeks? Or somewhere beyond? Does it matter if that research may one day help prevent miscarriages or serious fetal anomalies?

For decades, scientists around the world have abided by one widely accepted rule: Embryos being grown for research may not be cultivated beyond the 14-day mark.

That cutoff was based partly on biology — 14 days is typically when an embryo develops a structure known as the primitive streak, a sign it will no longer turn into twins — and partly on a recognition of the power of simple guidelines. (As the philosopher who helped hone those guidelines put it, "Everyone can count up to 14.") It was also, mostly, an abstraction. No one, it was thought, could grow an embryo in a lab for anywhere close to two weeks anyway.

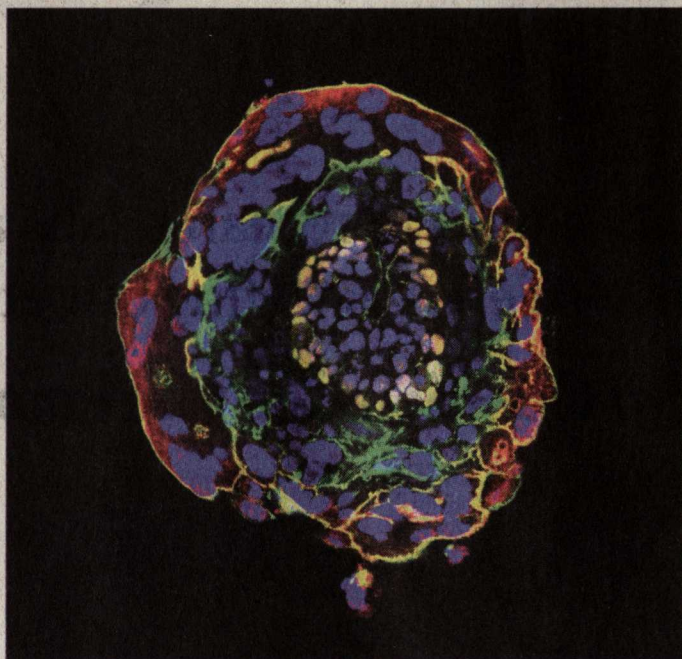
In fertility clinics, embryos typically grow in petri dishes for three to five days before being transferred into a patient's uterus (or cryogenic storage); it was widely thought that an embryo required this transfer to continue developing. One attempt was reported in 1984 to have grown two embryos to eight or nine days, but one of them then stuck to the petri dish and began sprouting outgrowths; the other "became degenerate," the scientists wrote, by the 197-hour mark.

So it was with some excitement that embryo researchers worldwide read about a 2013 experiment by Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz and her team of Cambridge University biologists. Using a culture medium en-

riched with nutrients and hormones, the researchers succeeded on their first attempt in growing two human embryos, donated by I.V.F. patients, beyond what was previously thought possible. When a colleague called Dr. Zernicka-Goetz at home to tell her that

one of them was still growing on Day 11, she was so thrilled, she couldn't go to sleep that night.

The room in her Cambridge lab devoted to embryo and stem cell research is laid out like a galley kitchen that a real estate agent



MARTA SHAHBAZI/ZERNICKA-GOETZ LAB

might euphemistically describe as compact; it can accommodate just about two scientists at a time. The research Dr. Zernicka-Goetz and her team conducted in those modest quarters yielded insights that changed how we understand the earliest days of human existence.

They discovered that by Days 8 or 9, embryonic cells began organizing themselves while they form different types of cells that will eventually become the placenta, the yolk sac that nourishes the embryo and the embryo itself. They found that the way the embryonic cells move and communicate with one another is what drives the formation of organs. And Dr. Zernicka-Goetz and her colleagues watched the process unfold in real time.

"Having insight into those stages of development opens this sort of — I don't want to call it a Pandora's box," Dr. Zernicka-Goetz said, pausing to look for the right metaphor in English. (She grew up in Warsaw, and Polish is her first language.) "You've uncovered something that you've never looked at, and it's full of gems."

As the clock ticked toward Day 14, the Cambridge team had to end its experiments in order to stay compliant with the law. Any gems that lie beyond the 14-day mark remain out of reach. And so, depending on your perspective, a rule that was once hypothetical has become either a restraint holding us back from understanding a critical stage of human life or a crucial check on the scientific impulse to push limits simply because we can.

The rule may be poised to change. In 2021 the International Society for Stem Cell Research, a nonprofit scientific body that sets widely adopted global research norms, proposed that, contingent on "broad public support" and legality in a given jurisdiction, "a specialized scientific and ethical oversight process could weigh" whether researchers would be permitted to grow embryos beyond 14 days. The new guidelines call, first and foremost, for "public conversations touching on the scientific significance as well as the societal and ethical issues raised by allowing such research." In some countries, this conversation has already begun.

The scientific significance of the research is clear. The period between the 14th day, when research must end, and the 28th day, when scientists can turn to embryonic tissue obtained from miscarriages or abortions to study, is when many pregnancies fail. It is also when organs begin forming and conditions such as cardiac abnormalities and neural tube defects arise. Observing that period of embryo development, often referred to as the black box of pregnancy, could lead to interventions for these developmental disorders and countless other medical breakthroughs. The societal and ethical issues, however, are also easy to

grasp. Even people who do not equate embryos with human beings may be unsettled by the idea of growing them in dishes to increasingly advanced stages for research purposes.

Perhaps, as Dr. Zernicka-Goetz mused, their scientific triumph had opened a Pandora's box after all.

**I**N ITS journey from the fertility clinic where it was created to Dr. Zernicka-Goetz's lab, an embryo loses one meaning and gains another. Perhaps its meaning changed many years ago, when it went from being a chance at a much-wanted baby to a conundrum, after a family felt itself incomplete. Perhaps it took a year or two or seven for the parents to decide they were done paying annual storage fees and were ready to choose a more definitive fate for their remaining embryos.

Dr. Zernicka-Goetz, like most developmental biologists, initially avoided doing human embryo research. It is riddled with controversy, is difficult to get approved, requires extensive specialized training and relies on costly equipment. For decades, she worked largely with embryos from mice and rats.

But that changed in 2006, when she received an unsettling call. She was pregnant, and a prenatal test that sampled her placental tissue had found 25 percent of the cells were genetically abnormal.

Unlike a majority of expecting patients, though, who might have panicked at this news, Dr. Zernicka-Goetz was intimately familiar with embryonic development through her research with mice. Her mind cycled through potential explanations. She suspected the issue was developmental, rather than hereditary, because a majority of the cells were normal. She also knew a developing embryo is remarkably resilient: In one research project, she removed cells from rapidly dividing mouse embryos and showed they grow into normal adult mice. In another, she and a student found that for mouse embryos with chromosomal abnormalities, their abnormal cells could be outcompeted by normal cells, dying at a rate more than twice that of the healthy ones. Mouse embryos, in other words, are capable of self-repair.

As it turned out, Dr. Zernicka-Goetz's embryo was, too. Her son Simon is now a loving teenager whose paintings decorate her Caltech office in Pasadena, Calif., where she runs a sparkling new laboratory. But the results of her pregnancy screening left her deeply shaken, setting her on a new line of inquiry into the origins of human development.

Her colleagues and mentors initially discouraged her from attempting to culture embryos beyond the pre-implantation stage; it would be far too difficult, they told

her. Even Dr. Zernicka-Goetz suspected that embryos required interactions with the uterine lining to continue growing.

The title of the paper that resulted from the research that evolved from her 2013 experiment hints, in scientific argot, at what is perhaps most remarkable about her team's findings: In "Self-Organization of the Human Embryo in the Absence of Maternal Tissues," published in 2016, she and her coauthors detailed how, even with no mom in sight, a human embryo is capable of ambling down its developmental path on autopilot, well past the point when it would have normally implanted in the uterus.

After Dr. Zernicka-Goetz and her team's successful experiment, another group, led by Ali Brivanlou at Rockefeller University, cultured embryos to Day 14. There is still more to be discovered within the bounds of the 14-day rule, as Dr. Zernicka-Goetz acknowledges. But many in the scientific community are already anticipating that crucial breakthroughs — the discoveries that might teach us why some babies are born with developmental defects, why some organs fail to grow properly and what causes miscarriages later in pregnancy — await us on the other side.

**W**HEN I.V.F. proved a success in 1978, much of the media attention was on the birth of Louise Brown, the world's first test-tube baby. But some were already worried about the research that had led to that moment — and what might follow.

Seeking ways to allay public concern, Britain set up a committee in 1982 to study the looming ethical issues that accompanied this new technology. It was tasked with establishing a blueprint for the country's regulatory regime for I.V.F., as well as for the embryo research that made it and other fertility care possible. Among the concerns at the time, said Mary Warnock, the philosopher who chaired the committee, was a belief that "there was something especially horrendous in deliberately creating a human being only then to deprive it of its chance of life by failing to place it in a human womb but instead throwing it down the sink."

The Warnock Committee, as it came to be known, quickly concluded that arriving at a societal consensus on the moral status of an embryo or establishing what could be done to it for legal purposes was a nearly impossible task. But the alternative was to have no limits or legislation at all, and this, Ms. Warnock said, "nobody wants."

And so, according to a recent book on the 14-day rule's history by sociologist Sarah Franklin and the legal scholar Emily Jackson, the committee landed onto certain recognizable biological developments to which moral significance could be ascribed. The formation of the primitive streak, for in-

stance, could be viewed as the point at which an embryo transforms from pure possibility to a unique individual.

This life stage, previously given little attention, suddenly formed the basis for a chain of ethical reasoning. The embryo has gone on to become the "defining" regulatory standard for human research," Dr. Franklin and Dr. Jackson wrote.

Such research has always been controversial, regardless of how development it takes place. It has a long history of important findings, some of them leading to new areas of scientific research. Stem cells, which are now used in treatments, among other therapies, were originally obtained from donated embryos and aborted fetuses.

Today a majority of I.V.F. cycles involve a failure, and approximately one-third of fertility cases are classified as unsuccessful. The push past 14 days is, in part, a way to understand what makes a pregnancy stick. But there are other important questions at play. As embryonic cells differentiate into the body's major organs, do stem cells become brain cells? What does the heart take shape? What determines the fate of cells that are chromosomally abnormal?

"In my conscience, I know there are benefits in pushing past 14 days," Dr. Brivanlou has said. "It may literally save the next generation."

But the bioethicist Ben Hurlbut, who says that others welcome the guardrails about what they might otherwise do, is troubled by the rapid leap from "should" without much due pause to "must." "Almost instantly, there's a kind of discourse of the need to limit," he told me. "Why? In what way? What main of life would we say, when it's possible to violate a rule, that the rule gives way to the violation?" The 14-day rule has always been slightly arbitrary. A 28-day rule would be even more arbitrary, would be stopping us from going further?

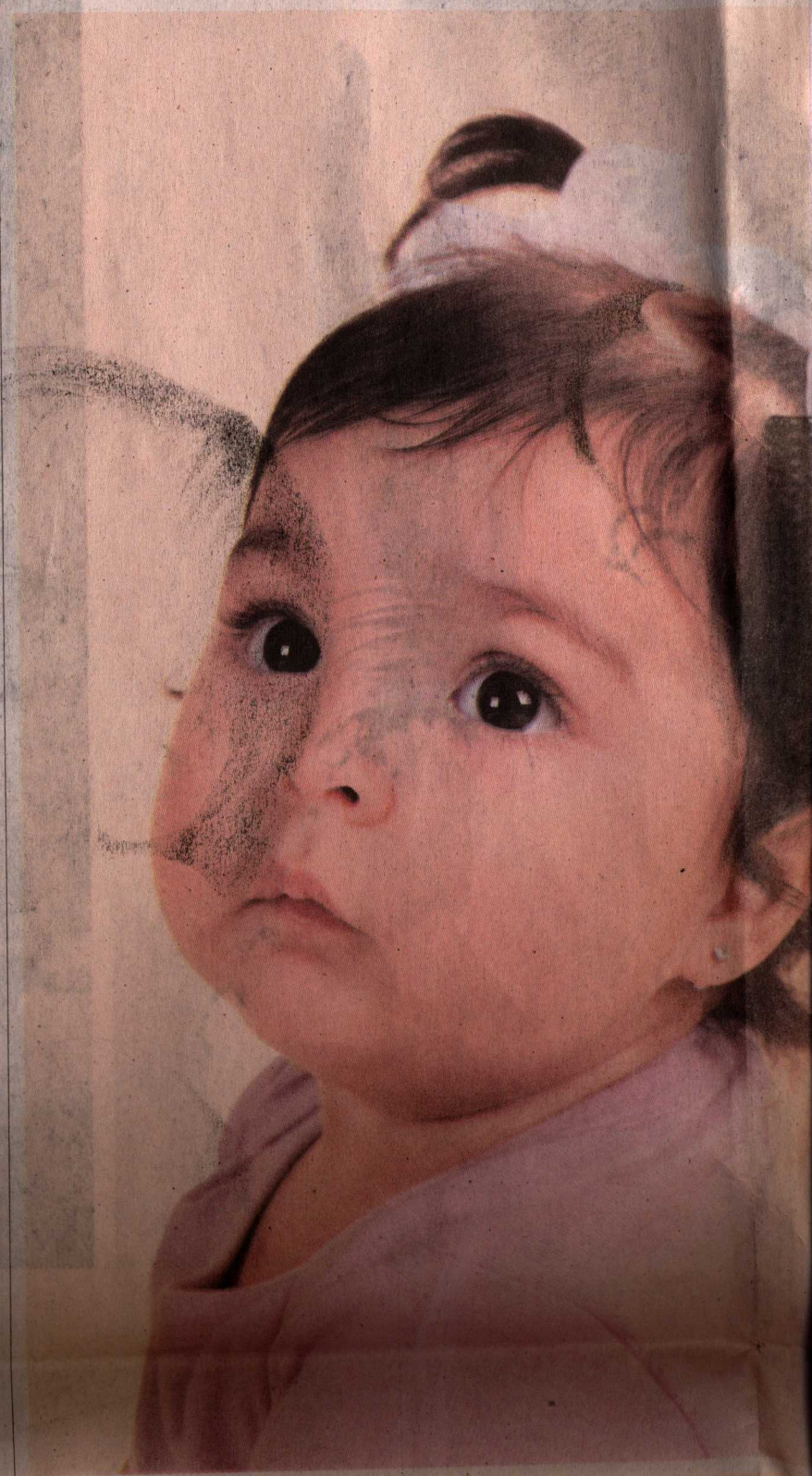
**W**HILE ethicists debate the rule, Dr. Zernicka-Goetz and other researchers groups around the world have been pursuing a parallel research track — embryo models from stem cells — that would allow scientists to probe the earliest days of human development while sidestepping some of the ethical questions. Building the models also allows scientists to better understand the mechanics of embryo development compared with simply observing it through a microscope. The current models can



OPINION

CHAPTER 2

# SHOULD HUMAN LIFE BE OPTIMIZED?



OPINION

**W**HEN Noor Siddiqui was growing up, her mother developed retinitis pigmentosa, a condition that leads to gradual vision loss. When Ms. Siddiqui's mother was in her 30s, she began going blind. Last summer, Ms. Siddiqui told a podcast host that in the years her family sought a diagnosis, "what stuck with me during that whole time was just this unfairness, right? I won this genetic lottery where I get to see my grandkids, right? And then for my mom, she lost it — right? — just because of a typo, a random letter change that, when she was born and was being formed, she ended up having and just totally changed the trajectory of her life," she said.

The "letter change" she referred to was probably a *de novo*, or spontaneous, mutation in her mother's genome. "It wasn't my grandparents', her parents', fault," Ms. Siddiqui continued. "She didn't inherit it from them. It just spontaneously, randomly, by just sheer horrible luck happened to her." This experience "burned a hole in my heart for a while," eventually leading her to found Orchid, a way of helping parents anticipate just such genetic misfortunes.

Orchid screens embryos' DNA for hundreds of conditions, such as retinitis pigmentosa, which can be traced to a single genetic variant. But the company also goes further, offering what is known as polygenic screening, which gives parents what is essentially a risk profile on each embryo's propensity for conditions such as heart disease, for which the genetic component is far more complex.

Today it is an expensive procedure offered to patients undergoing in vitro fertilization, who are often but not always infertile couples seeking treatment. But Ms. Siddiqui — and others in Silicon Valley, where investors in and users of this technology abound — envisions such comprehensive screening eventually replacing the old-fashioned way of having children altogether. "Sex is for fun, and embryo screening is for babies," she said in a video she shared on X. "It's going to become insane not to screen for these things."

"These things" presumably refers to conditions like obesity and autism, both of which Orchid says it can screen for. What Ms. Siddiqui and others who run screening companies tend to talk about less is that such things could also include traits like intellectual ability and height.

The regulatory regimes that govern the creation of life around the world vary widely. Portugal generally limits cryopreservation of embryos to three years; in Britain, it's 55. Poland requires that unused embryos be donated to other couples, anonymously, after 20 years. Israel permits parents to request posthumous sperm retrieval after the death of a son. Single women in China are generally not allowed to freeze their eggs, and in South Korea they may not use I.V.F. In the United Arab Emirates, I.V.F. is only for mar-



## OPINION

COLUMNIST | EZRA KLEIN

# 'You Try to Build Anything, and You're Stepping Into Quicksand'

I've been thinking about something that Jake Sullivan, President Joe Biden's national security adviser, said in a post-election interview: "The president has been operating on a time horizon measured in decades, while the political cycle is measured in four years."

What we're seeing now is that this was a false choice. There is no way to cleave the policy of the next decade from the outcome of the next election. If you lose power, your carefully constructed set of bills and international alliances can be turned to cinder by your successor. If it is true that Biden believed he was choosing the politics of posterity over the policies Americans would feel before the election, then he chose wrong.

But I don't think it was a choice. Delay has become the default setting of American government. The 2021 infrastructure law was supposed to pump hundreds of billions into roads, bridges, rural broadband, electric vehicle chargers. By 2024, few of its projects were finished or installed. That wasn't because Biden or his team wanted to run for re-election on the backs of news releases rather than ribbon cuttings. But the administration didn't make the changes necessary to deliver on a time frame the public could feel. Many members of Biden's staff now bitterly regret it. That includes Sullivan, who described his experience as "profoundly radicalizing."

"Whether it's infrastructure or submarines or energy generation or transmission lines or chip fabs — it is crazy the extent to which we have clogged up our delivery," Sullivan told me. "Part of it is laws and regulations. Part of it is the self-deterrence of caution. Part of it is litigation. Part of it is complacency. Part of it is bureaucracy. But what I encountered in my four years as national security adviser was a constant and growing set of obstacles to getting anything done fast. It was a huge frustration. Huge."

A swifter government is possible. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Medicare program into law on July 30, 1965; it began covering seniors a year later, on July 1, 1966. Compare that with the Biden administration's Medicare reforms. In 2022, as part of the Inflation Reduction Act, the Biden administration gave Medicare the authority to bargain down prices on 10 drugs; those prices won't go into effect until . . . 2026. As Mike Konczal, a former economic adviser to Biden, noted, that is "just in time for President Trump to take credit for them going into the midterms."

The difference between those two processes is, well, process. Over decades, Democrats and Republicans alike came to embrace the virtues of delay. Delay allows for the gathering of information, the input of affected communities, the thinking through of

Was it really impossible for a signature program begun in Biden's first year to have delivered its benefits by the end of his fourth year?

In March, Sarah Morris, a former deputy administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, testified before Congress in a bid to save the project. She laid out the 14-phase process that the broadband program was following — a 14-phase process that, by March of 2025, had been completed by only three of the 56 states and territories that had applied for the money.

I read the process out to Jon Stewart, on his podcast, and he reacted with astonishment. The clip was then repeatedly promoted on X by Musk, who thought it was a delightful advertisement of government inefficiency — and who has his own rooting interest here, as the Trump administration is seeking to open the program to Musk's Starlink service.

I find Musk's efforts with DOGE particularly repellent because I so firmly believe in the need for the thing that it pretends to be. I would like to see a government that efficiently delivers services to citizens; DOGE, by firing I.R.S. and Social Security employees en masse, is going to throw those agencies into chaos and cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars in missed tax collections. I would like to see a government that more efficiently and ambitiously funds scientific research; DOGE, in gutting our scientific agencies and lawlessly firing more or less everyone who has ever written or spoken the word "diversity," is going to hollow out the very functions of government I want to supercharge.

DOGE seeks not efficiency but control: It is a purge of the bureaucracy meant to give Trump, in his second term, the control over the administrative state he believes he lacked in his first term. And here I was, giving Musk ammunition for his effort.

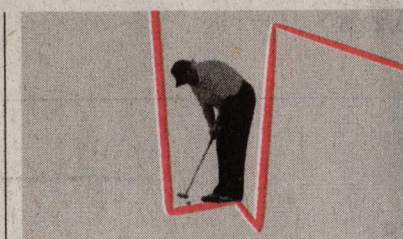
This did not thrill liberals, and I got some calls from members of the Biden administration who felt my comments heaped too much blame on the administration. That was fair: Portions of that 14-stage process were insisted upon by congressional Republicans. And the reasoning Republicans gave for those complex requirements was that they feared waste and overspending. This is a common way Republicans gum up the government: by making it waste dollars and time in lengthy paperwork processes in which it tries to prove it will not waste dollars or time.

Still, what I found, as I talked to various people who had been part of the broadband program, was that much of the process was worse than I'd known — one participant es-



People admire Elon Musk's ruthlessness. But leadership by intimidation doesn't work.

BY ADAM GRANT | PAGE 13



Free trade's bounty  
Trump's sloppy tari

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | PAGE 15

IDEAS | CONVERSATION | ANALYSIS

## Sunday Opinion

The New York Times

This baby was carefully selected

